

and representatives of the trusts inspected.

The report goes on to say, "Like other inspectorates, CHI has had difficulty ensuring consistency between review teams. [The] reports are only consistent in being inconsistent."

Although largely critical, the report acknowledges the achievements of CHI in its short life span. It had made inspection more palatable to NHS managers and professionals alike, after overcoming their initial suspicions, says the report.

Debashis Singh *London*

The NHS Improvers: A study of the Commission for Health Improvement is accessible from www.kingsfund.org.uk

US universities threaten to cancel subscriptions to Elsevier journals

Several of the United States' most prestigious universities are threatening to cancel their subscriptions to scientific journals published by Elsevier, in protest at what they call exorbitant pricing. Stanford University's Faculty Senate, the latest to take action on the issue, also called on academic staff to consider placing their research in "open access" journals.

Other universities to pass similar resolutions in recent months include Harvard, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Duke, Cornell, the University of Connecticut, the University of California, and North Carolina State University. University librarians say that journal price hikes combined with a weak dollar and falling budgets leave them no choice but to cancel subscriptions.

Michael Keller, University Librarian at Stanford, said: "It's not just that the prices have risen much faster than inflation, it's the practice of 'bundling' journals together. Often we have to buy hundreds of journals we don't want to get those we do. We're hoping this new policy will lead to a situation where scientific and medical publishing is less dominated by corporations whose interests are inimical to

the academic ideal of free exchange of ideas."

Eric Merkel-Sobotta, director of corporate relations at Elsevier, said his company did not force institutions to buy "bundles" of journals. "We have volume discounts and special offers, but if an institution wants to subscribe to just one journal, or three, or all 1800, that's up to them. Naturally, the price per journal is lower when we offer volume discounts. Overall, our prices are very competitive."

● This week in Britain, parliament's science and technology committee began an inquiry into journal pricing, which will look into the issue of "big deal schemes," or the bundling of journal packages sold to academic institutions.

Owen Dyer *London*

People with sickle cell disease should be screened for pulmonary hypertension

Pulmonary hypertension has been identified as a major risk factor for death in adults with sickle cell disease, and all people with the disease should be screened for this complication, a new study says.

Almost a third of adult patients with sickle cell disease who were screened with Doppler echocardiography were found to have moderate to severe pulmonary hypertension that had not previously been detected (*New England Journal of Medicine* 2004;350:886-95).

The researchers, from the US National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, Maryland, and the Howard University Center for Sickle Cell Disease, Washington, DC, said the findings were so striking that all patients with sickle cell disease should be regularly screened.

In addition, they said, patients with mild to moderate pulmonary hypertension should have the condition treated, because the increased risk of death seems to be high even in less severe cases.

Scott Gottlieb *New York*

US societies to defy ban on editing articles from embargoed countries

Owen Dyer *London*

A group of American scientific societies is planning to defy a recent US government ruling that has prevented their journals from publishing work by scientists from Iran, Iraq, Cuba, Libya, and Sudan, all countries subject to US trade embargoes.

Historically, US trade embargoes have regulated the transfer of goods but not of information, as law makers believed that a free exchange of ideas would encourage democratic development in the targeted countries. Trade legislation has normally specified journal articles and other written material as exempt from regulation.

But last September the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, which administers trade embargoes, announced that any substantive changes made by American reviewers, translators, or editors to manuscripts from the embargoed countries would constitute a service to the country and would be permissible only with a special licence. Violators of the trade regulations can incur fines as high as \$500 000 (£268 000; €400 000) and jail sentences of up to 10 years.

The American Chemical Society, publisher of 30 journals in physical and organic chemistry, stopped accepting articles from authors in embargoed countries last September but has now decided to return to "business as usual." After taking legal advice, the society has concluded that if the government prosecutes, it can mount a defence based on the first amendment to the US constitution, which guarantees freedom of speech and the press.

According to the president of the society's publications division, Robert Bovenschulte, the society has formed a task force with other, unnamed scientific publishers, which will consider legal action "if other avenues of redress fail to overturn the OFAC [Office of Foreign Assets Control] ruling."

"We reluctantly imposed a temporary moratorium in September," said Mr Bovenschulte, "but this was at odds with our own ethical guidelines, which demand that we consider what

to publish based upon its scientific merit, and that alone. The advancement of science is a global activity, and this ruling is frankly inimical to that."

Some publishers have applied for an Office of Foreign Assets Control licence to edit submitted articles, whereas others, such as the Nature Publishing Group, have never stopped taking manuscripts from embargoed countries. Most publishers now doubt that the government will prosecute if they defy the ban.

Fredun Hojabri, a California based Iranian scientist, blames the Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers for seeking legal clarification from the Office of Foreign Assets Control, prompting officials to issue September's interpretative ruling.

"It all started two years ago when the IEEE [Institute for Electrical and Electronics Engineers] got in trouble with OFAC for setting up a bank account to fund travel to a scientific conference in Iran," he said. "It was they who asked OFAC for a ruling on this issue."

A legal opinion sought by the American Association of Publishers in January said the ban was a clear case of prior restraint, and violated both the first amendment and the Berman amendment exempting informational material from trade embargoes.

Pat Schroeder, the association's president, said: "This ruling is baffling. How does editing manuscripts threaten the US?" □



President Bush's sanctions are affecting scientific articles as well as trade